

NCCOAST.ORG | *Working Together for a Healthy Coast* | FALL 2020

OUR COAST



PROJECT UPDATES

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HOLIDAY GIVING GUIDE!**



North Carolina
Coastal Federation
Working Together for a Healthy Coast

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of Our Coast,

I am writing this column a month before one of the most significant elections ever held in our nation. By the time it appears in your mailbox, we should know the winners and losers. One thing's for certain even before the election is complete—whoever ultimately controls power in Washington, Raleigh and in courthouses and town halls must tackle urgent concerns that plague coastal communities.

From Wall Street to Front Street, our nation has become increasingly polarized, and that all too often stymies the ability of the government to solve everyday problems that confront our coast. It's even more difficult for elected officials to mount meaningful, long-term programs that take on large, chronic issues, such as coastal water quality and habitat degradation, hazards to life and property caused by extreme weather, and lack of compliance with existing environmental laws and rules.

Since the formation of the North Carolina Coastal Federation in 1982, political power has ebbed back and forth much like the pendulum on a windup clock. As a charity, the Coastal Federation is not allowed to engage in political campaigns or elections. Instead, we constantly strive to cooperate and help build bridges with decision-makers. But that does not mean that we shy away from holding elected officials accountable for their actions (either with praise or criticism depending on their decisions).

It's been almost 50 years since significant environmental laws and programs that still govern and safeguard our coast were enacted. Federal laws like the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act and Coastal Zone Management Act were

enacted by a largely Democratic Congress and signed into law by President Richard Nixon. In N.C., a similar bipartisan effort took place when the state's first Republican governor in 100 years (James Holshouser) supported and signed landmark environmental laws passed by the N.C. General Assembly at a time when it was dominated by Democrats.

Today, it's very hard to imagine such bipartisan cooperation in passing landmark, and effective, environmental laws, given the intense political polarization we now have. Sadly, on many issues, conflicts are so intense that it's hard to overcome these divisions. Every now and then, however, certain coastal opportunities or concerns emerge that clearly show that public interests and consensus are powerful forces that unite and bring people together to achieve a common good.

Some examples of this all too rare cooperation include the overwhelming support the federation recently received from Democratic Governor Roy Cooper and the N.C. General Assembly (through its Republican leadership) to support and pay for oyster restoration efforts, living shorelines, water quality enhancements, marine debris and abandoned boat removal and acquisition of critical coastal lands to enhance coastal resiliency.

Over nearly four decades, it has become obvious to me that it's much easier to stop bad things from happening than it is to carry-out long-term strategies that effectively manage and fix some of our most fundamental environmental and economic needs. If we just play defense, the result remains a steady and continuing deterioration of our coastal environment and economy. That is why we work so hard here at the Coastal Federation to anticipate

Photo: Vance Miller



emerging issues and opportunities, and mount programs and campaigns that seek to establish long-term and enduring solutions to our coastal management needs.

As you read this newsletter, please realize the progress made toward coastal protection and restoration results from long-term strategic visions we've devised around each of the major real-world goals that we seek to obtain. These action plans are not simply a response to the latest headline, but rather have been developed through extensive stakeholder engagement efforts so that many people from all walks of life feel real ownership in the actions we take. This results in measurable and tangible long-term accomplishments that make a major difference in how our coast is protected and restored – not only tomorrow, but for many decades to come.

So whatever political landscape we have now inherited, the federation will remain a powerful "force of nature" that consistently shapes the future of our coast by our forward looking work to improve our environment and economy on behalf of everyone who loves to get their feet wet as they live, work and play.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Todd Miller".

—Todd Miller, Executive Director



**North Carolina
Coastal Federation**
Working Together for a Healthy Coast

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WATER QUALITY

nccoast.org/stormwater



Lake Mattamuskeet Plan Implementation Underway

Located in eastern North Carolina within the heart of Hyde County lies nationally significant Lake Mattamuskeet. Although it's the state's largest lake by area at 40,000 acres, the average depth is just 4 feet. This water body is the center of the Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge and a vital part of Hyde County's amazing natural and cultural heritage.

The Coastal Federation began work to protect the lake in 2017 with the development of a watershed restoration plan. Working with Hyde County, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we formed a partnership to address the lake's poor water quality and chronic flooding. After an 18-month long planning process, the Lake Mattamuskeet Watershed Restoration Plan was officially approved by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality in 2019.

Since then, partners have been working diligently to secure resources and advance key strategies in the plan. In August, the team held a virtual public meeting to share the status of their efforts and receive input from people who care deeply for this truly special place. Coastal residents and visitors alike value this national treasure and a record number of participants attended the meeting to hear updates on efforts to protect and restore it.

Hyde County secured funding from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust

Fund to help develop a service district for the lake watershed. Once finalized, a district will provide an official entity to fund and oversee water management operations.

This CWMTF funding is also supporting work by Geosyntec Consultants and Coastal Protection Engineering, who are developing a watershed-scale model to better understand where and how water currently moves through the watershed and engineering designs to manage water within the watershed.

"With the guidance of the community vested in the Lake Mattamuskeet Watershed Restoration Plan, Hyde County is excited to transition to the engineering phase of the efforts within the watershed. This planning is critical as we work towards implementing real solutions for water quality and quantity issues at Lake Mattamuskeet," said Daniel Brinn, Water and Flood Control Coordinator for Hyde County.

In addition, with funding by the National Science Foundation, East Carolina University engineering students are working with Geosyntec Consultants, Coastal Protection Engineering and local residents to design potential solutions to reduce flooding in and around the Lake.

"We are excited to be partnering with the team from Geosyntec and Coastal Protection Engineering. Their expertise in coastal modeling and design will improve the solutions developed by the students to restore this important ecosystem," said Dr. Randall Etheridge, Assistant Professor in the Department of Engineering at East Carolina University.

Finally, a \$1.8 million state appropriation will assist Hyde County with construction of a pump station and related watershed restoration infrastructure.

Working collectively, these initiatives are advancing the Plan on several fronts, targeting its key goals to protect the way of life in Hyde County, actively manage the lake water levels and restore water quality and clarity.

To view the complete plan and future updates visit:
nccoast.org/lakemattamuskeet.

UNCW Rain Garden in the Works

Slow it down, spread it out, soak it in. That's what a new rain garden planned for construction this fall at UNCW will do with polluted stormwater runoff. The rain garden at Suite Services Loop Road on campus will collect rain from nearby buildings and parking lots, capturing the runoff that otherwise runs into the adjacent campus creek. That creek is at the headwaters of the Bradley Creek watershed, which has a formal plan for restoration.

Back in 2007, the Coastal Federation, City of Wilmington, Town of Wrightsville Beach and project partners developed a watershed restoration plan that focuses on reducing the amount of stormwater runoff transporting bacteria and pollutants into Bradley and Hewletts creeks.

This EPA Section 319 funded rain garden is one of many restoration projects in the watershed. Restoring water quality in these creeks is a long-term, multi-decade effort.

"Restoring water quality in these watersheds is a major priority for the federation," said Lauren Kolodij, Coastal Federation deputy director. "We need projects like this to help demonstrate techniques that can be replicated throughout the watershed. Having this rain garden in a university setting is great for educating audiences about the impacts of stormwater and ways to reduce it."

LIVING SHORELINES

nccoast.org/livingshorelines

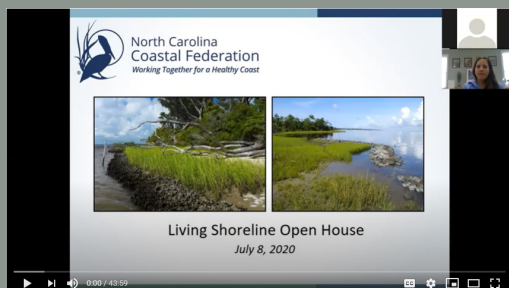
Living Shoreline Virtual Workshop Now Available to the Public

Are you experiencing shoreline erosion? Living Shorelines are an innovative way to protect soundside shorelines from erosion, while at the same time preserving natural coastal ecosystems. This past summer, the Coastal Federation held a virtual Open House on living shorelines. We are pleased to offer it to the public by going online at: <http://bit.ly/LSVirtualWorkshop>

Here, you will learn from Coastal Federation staff, local professionals and contractors about the benefits of living shorelines, including how they reduce erosion, protect coastal habitat, improve water quality and buffer shorelines from rising water levels. In addition, the workshop presents steps on how to permit and build living shorelines.

For decades, the typical response to controlling erosion on North Carolina's estuarine shorelines has been to build bulkheads or place stone riprap along problem areas. Living shorelines offer a better alternative by utilizing more natural techniques such as restoring salt marsh and oysters as an environmentally friendly solution to shoreline erosion.

The online workshop was organized with support from the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration/ National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/ Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership.



Living Shoreline Construction at Whittaker Point Complete

The end of summer marked the completion of construction of a 2,460 foot granite sill living shoreline at the town of Oriental's Whittaker Pointe peninsula.

The Coastal Federation worked with the town, Quible & Associates P.C., Carolina Marine Structures, Restoration Systems and local residents to construct the large-scale living shoreline that now helps protect nearly 300 town buildings, businesses and residences against waves and surge from the Neuse River during storms and routine high wind events. Restoration Systems planted 8,000 plugs of wetland plants landward of the sill, and oyster shell bags will be added to the Whittaker Creek side of the project this fall. Finally, additional plants will be planted next spring to complete the project.

"Your faith in our project and Dr. Weaver's involvement in each step were invaluable and likely the primary reason for its success," said Oriental Town Manager Diane Miller in a recent letter to the Coastal Federation.

"This project is a perfect example of the federation's mission 'Working Together for a Healthy Coast,'" said Dr. Lexia Weaver, Coastal Federation Coastal Scientist. "We are so thankful for all of our partners that helped to restore Whittaker Pointe and its valuable habitats."

Work also continued on a similar project at White Point in the town of Atlantic, which is adjacent to Atlantic Harbor. The harbor is now being protected by a recently completed

1,720 foot living shoreline made of granite rock. The site also includes the installation of Atlantic Reefmaker EcoSystems wave attenuators that block wave energy while still allowing water to flow. Wetland plants will be added to the shoreline next spring. Once complete, the living shoreline will help reduce eroding dredge spoil sediment from filling the harbor, which limits boat passage. The fishing community depends on the harbor and is enthusiastic about the project.

"Atlantic Harbor is the gateway to Core and Pamlico Sounds, and the Atlantic Ocean for much of the fishing and boating community Down East, yet keeping White Point intact, which protects the Harbor, has proved to be a challenge we have wrestled with for decades," said Rudi Rudolph, Carteret County Shore Protection Manager. "The granite sill/living shoreline project spearheaded by the federation and Carteret County is aimed to provide a long term solution for the Harbor while providing a tremendous amount of upland, marsh, and shallow water habitat."

These living shoreline projects were made possible through funding from the Environmental Enhancement Grant Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Golden Leaf Foundation, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Emergency Watershed Protection Program.

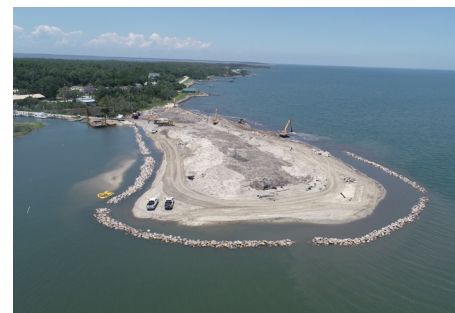


Photo: Greg Flinn

OYSTERS

nccoast.org/oysters

Restaurant to Reef Oyster Shell Recycling Program Builds First Reef

From a tasty supper to the sound, a new program spearheaded by the Coastal Federation is collecting shell from Outer Banks restaurants and recycling them to build new oyster reefs.

"People are eating more oysters than they used to, and we're dedicated to getting the shells back in the water to guarantee more oysters to come," said Dan Lewis, former owner of Coastal Provisions now the Shuck Truck in the Town of Duck.

Usually oyster restoration projects require the use of purchased shell which can cost about \$3.00 per bushel.

But this reef was different.

This summer, the Coastal Federation partnered with the local volunteers, restaurants, fishers and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries to build its first oyster reef entirely from recycled oyster shells.

The two-acre reef in Wysocking Bay, Hyde County, known as the Lone Tree Creek reef, was built solely from oyster shell collected and recycled by local Outer Banks Restaurants, oyster roasts and volunteers through the Restaurant to Reef Program. Through the program, volunteers collect the discarded shells, which are then used by the Coastal Federation and other partners to build and restore oyster reefs.

Dubbed the Restaurant to Reef Oyster Shell Recycling program, the Coastal Federation is thrilled to kick off the newly formed shell recycling program, especially since it is illegal to dump the shells in landfills and the state's shell recycling program ended a couple of years ago.

"The commitment from volunteers and restaurants to ensure that the shells make it back to the water is so impressive. It's tough work, and the payoff isn't immediate, so it's obvious that they care deeply for our coastal environment," said Leslie Vegas, Coastal Federation Coastal Specialist.

For the past two years, volunteers have collected shell from five partner restaurants—Blue Water Grill & Raw Bar, Sugar Shack Seafood Market, Coastal Provisions Oyster Bar and Wine Bar Café, Awful Arthur's Oyster Bar and Mulligan's—and delivered them to drop-off points in Dare County.

The pilot program was created to restart oyster shell recycling in the Outer Banks. For more information about the Restaurant to Reef Oyster Shell Recycling Program or to volunteer to help please contact Leslie Vegas at 252-473-1607 or lesliev@nccoast.org and visit nccoast.org/restaurant-to-reef-program.



NOAA Funds Additional Oyster Reefs

Baby oysters and many other coastal species will soon have a new home in the Pamlico Sound. The Coastal Federation, in partnership with the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, received funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to build 15 acres of new oyster sanctuary habitat in Pamlico Sound.



Oyster sanctuaries produce baby oysters that "seed" harvestable reefs and serve as an insurance policy for the Sound's oyster population in the face of man-made or natural disasters.

This large-scale, \$2,250,000 project expands on the state's significant investment in oyster restoration. It will benefit not only oysters, but also coastal species such as gag grouper and white, brown and pink shrimp.

"We've made tremendous progress on sanctuaries through this partnership between NOAA, the state and private contractors in the past three years. We are excited to see the work continue," said Erin Fleckenstein, Coastal Federation Coastal Scientist. volunteers involved with the oyster program on a variety of tasks and lessons.

Oyster Blueprint Update Underway

Building new oyster reefs is a key strategy of the North Carolina Oyster Blueprint. The five-year Blueprint is being updated this year with input from long-term stakeholders involved in growing, harvesting, studying, educating, managing and eating oysters. Collectively, the group has worked with the Coastal Federation to protect and restore North Carolina's oyster habitats and fisheries for the past 17 years. Their work will continue in coming years under the guidance of the updated plan, ensuring oysters in North Carolina perpetuate a healthy and robust environment and economy. Learn more at ncoysters.org/2020blueprintupdate.

MARINE DEBRIS

nccoast.org/marinedebris

Northeast Coast Marine Debris to be Removed

The Scrappy Doo may have once been a seaworthy boat, but today it and many other abandoned and derelict vessels are scattered along the coast, impeding navigation and littering the marsh. A recent grant award by the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program to the Coastal Federation is supporting removal of the Scrappy Doo and other boats like it causing harm to the northeast coast.



The Coastal Federation will work with Dare County and the N.C. Division of Coastal Management to remove over 20 vessels that have been identified, as well as other large-scale debris in the Albemarle-Pamlico Sound, in coming months.

"The Division is looking forward to working with the Coastal Federation and project partners to remove vessels and debris to improve habitat quality at Reserve sites," said Rebecca Ellin, Coastal Reserve Program Manager for the N.C. Division of Coastal Management. "Through collaborative efforts such as these, we can reduce marine debris in coastal N.C. to

protect habitats and enhance the safety and enjoyment of our coastal environment."

Northeast coast residents Rick and Mary Ann Jones enjoy paddling, and have noted that, "During these outings, we continued to find small channels into the marsh, with several derelict boats partially sunk or grounded in the marsh. While not considered navigable channels, removal of the derelict boats from these estuaries will ease the passage of our canoes and kayaks, allow the marsh to return to its natural state as habitat for all kinds of critters, and remove a potential hazard from storm surge displacement of derelict boats into navigable channels and/or resulting in additional damage to local properties."

Marine Debris Collection Update

The North Carolina Coastal Federation is cleaning up tons of marine debris and dozens of abandoned and derelict vessels scattered along the southeast and central N.C. coast. This effort is possible by funding from the N.C. General Assembly and the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection Program that is being administered by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management.

Working with small skiffs and small crews, area fishermen have been combing through public trust shorelines and into hidden marsh areas of dredge spoil islands to remove large deposits of pressure treated wood,

plastic and polystyrene floats and other debris from docks and water front structures damaged by Hurricane Florence.

The Rachel Carson Reserve, Hammocks Beach State Park, Permuda Island Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve have been the focal point of Coastal Federation debris removal efforts over the past several months. In the time from July to September alone, over 75 tons of debris have been removed.

This amount is in addition to the over 315 tons of debris that have been removed over the course of these projects since 2019. Central coast cleanup crew leader Donovan Smith said, "I couldn't believe how much debris is out here. It would be great if we could cleanup all down the coastline. I'm a commercial fisherman on the side, so it's important to me to keep the water clean. All the debris, trash and pollution is not good for wildlife, fish and oysters. It's not good for anything."

In the southeast, crew leader Joe Huie recently said, "I don't think people could even perceive how much debris is really out there. I believe that if we started debris removal around New River in Onslow County and moved our way down south into Brunswick County, by the time we finished in Brunswick and went back home over the course of a year or less, the places we had originally cleaned would be covered with debris again, and that's without a hurricane like Florence contributing large amounts."

N.C. Marine Debris Symposium set for February 2021

Want to learn about recent actions to prevent and reduce marine debris in North Carolina? Join the Coastal Federation and partners for the **N.C. Marine Debris Virtual Symposium, set for Feb. 10-12, 2021.** The Symposium will feature updates on efforts to implement the state's first ever N. C. Marine Debris Action Plan, which sets a framework for preventing and removing debris along the N.C. coast.

COASTAL MANAGEMENT

nccoast.org/coastalmanagement

Coastal Advocate Kerri Allen Receives Award

Congratulations to our very own **Kerri Allen** for being awarded as one of

Wilmington's 40 under 40! The annual program hosted by the StarNews Media and Wilmington Chamber of Commerce recognizes 40 young professionals under 40 years of age who go above and beyond in the Cape Fear region. According to the StarNews, "The 40 Under 40 Award is designed to spotlight those who excel in their professional roles as well as in the ways they serve our community." We are so proud of Kerri and all of the great work she has, and continues to, accomplish.



Better Protections for the Lower Cape Fear River

Dredging, incompatible industrial uses and development have negatively impacted drinking and surface waters of the Lower Cape Fear River for decades. In 2018, the Coastal Federation set out on a mission to reverse these trends and make a plan for protection and restoration. The result: a collaboratively prepared and adopted Lower Cape Fear River Blueprint that sets a course for the river's future.

Working with scientists, government agencies and stakeholders, the project partners identified strategies for sustainable conservation and restoration. One such strategy focuses on the current and formal SC classification of the river. This classification is the state's least stringent for saltwater, which limits how we

can protect it. Working with the N.C. Division of Water Resources, the Coastal Federation is currently evaluating options to offset the classification and find more protections for the river.

The waters in the lower Cape Fear River are widely used for fishing, swimming and boating especially around popular Carolina Beach State Park. These waters are also nationally significant, providing critical habitat for the endangered Atlantic sturgeon fish. To read the approved Blueprint go to nccoast.org/lcfrb.

Offshore Drilling Moratorium Expanded for NC

President Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum on Sept. 8 that extended the offshore drilling moratorium for portions of the Central and most of the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and expanded it to the Atlantic Coast of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina. Following this news, the Coastal Federation sprang into action, encouraging members to contact their local, state and federal representatives to request the moratorium include the waters off our coast. The grassroots activity accompanied a formal request by Gov. Roy Cooper urging President Trump and his administration to include North Carolina.

N.C. Senator Thom Tillis issued a news release on Sept. 21, announcing that, "North Carolina will be included in a Presidential Memorandum withdrawing new leasing for offshore oil and gas developments." President Trump expanded the offshore drilling moratorium to the waters off the coast of North Carolina through a Presidential Moratorium on Sept. 25.

Offshore drilling and seismic surveying for oil and gas exploration would not

be compatible with our vibrant coastal environment and economy. That's the sentiment from 100% of the oceanfront municipalities and from Cooper who stated in September that he will "stay vigilant and ready to resume the fight in the event the federal government makes any move toward offshore drilling."

Legal Challenge of Proposed Seismic Surveys Dismissed After IHAs Expire

The recently announced offshore drilling ban did not include a ban on proposed seismic surveys as the activity is authorized under different sections of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act. However, the Incidental Harassment Authorizations (IHAs) that were issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service in November 2018 as a pre-qualification before BOEM can consider the permit applications are set to expire on Nov. 30. There are no statutory or regulatory mechanisms for extending the specific IHAs nor a basis for re-issuing or renewing them. Therefore, the legal challenge the federation was party along to with other leading environmental groups has been dismissed by the U.S. District Court. A welcome outcome as the intent of the lawsuit was to prevent the negative effects of continuous and cumulative airgun blasting from impacting our coastal environment and economy.





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Holiday Giving Guide

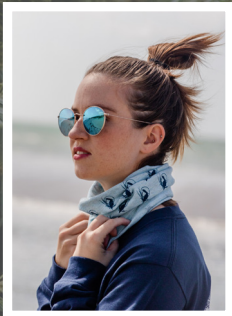
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nccoast.org/myoyster



Adopt a Hermit Crab—or a Tide Pool

Bring coastal education home for the holidays. Organized with young learners in mind, this program delivers color, beauty and coastal science no matter your distance from the coast. Plus, when you Adopt a Tide Pool, a year-long membership keeps the family engaged beyond the holidays.

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nccoast.org/myhermitcrab

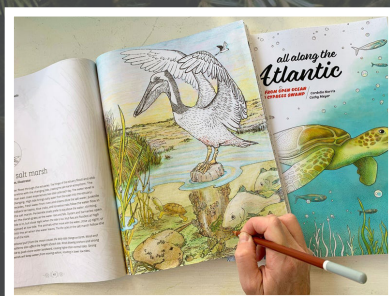


Photo: Luna Creative

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